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Contra backers expect to beat Senate disapproval of aid

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Proponents of aid to the Nicaraguan resistance expect to win a close Senate vote this week on legislation disapproving release of the final \$40 million in U.S. assistance for this year.

As the latest round in the continuing battle over aid to the rebels opposing Nicaragua's Marxist Sandinista regime, the Senate vote will be mainly symbolic, since rebel-aid opponents concede they cannot block the money regardless of the vote.

"I don't have high hopes of winning," said Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd. "I'm not overly sanguine."

Debate is scheduled to begin this afternoon on a resolution disapproving the release of the final \$40 million of the \$100 million rebel-aid package approved by Congress last year.

The vote is expected tomorrow. Both sides say it will be close, but Senate Republicans think they have the votes to defeat the resolution.

Even if it passes, it would have no effect because the House has not

voted directly on the release of the \$40 million.

Congress had 15 days to disapprove the spending after President Reagan's formal request for its release earlier this month. After the Friday deadline for congressional action, the money will be released automatically.

In the House, where support for the rebels is less strong, Democratic leaders refused to allow a vote on the release of the \$40 million.

Instead, the House last week approved, by 230-196, a bill imposing a moratorium on rebel aid until the

administration can provide an accounting for previous aid, including private donations and any proceeds from the sale of arms to Iran.

By focusing on accountability instead of support for the rebels, lawmakers said the moratorium proposal would get more votes than a straight up-or-down vote on the release of the \$40 million.

Mr. Byrd said he wants a Senate vote on the moratorium bill, but Republicans have threatened to filibuster if the bill is brought to the Senate floor. "We're going to talk a lot," said one Republican aide.

While investigators are still unable to trace the proceeds from the Iran arms sale, a recent House Intelligence Committee report shows that the \$60 million sent to the rebels through CIA channels this year has been used largely as Congress intended.

Some Democratic opponents of rebel aid, including Sen. Christopher Dodd of Connecticut, have called the current Contra aid fight pointless since, even if the resolution of disapproval passed both houses, there are not enough votes to override a presidential veto.

But others, including Mr. Byrd, consider the vote a way to signal eroding congressional support for aid to the rebels in anticipation of a presidential request for \$105 million in new rebel aid later this year.

Mr. Byrd said U.S. support for the Contras has been a failure and new approaches are needed, including strong U.S. backing for a new Nicaraguan peace initiative by Costa Rican president Oscar Arias.

The Senate voted 97-1 last week to support the general thrust of the Arias peace proposal.